

Day 3 – Sunday, January 17th

The day began for most around 8 am for breakfast. In years past, breakfast was the check-in time, a gathering point, a time to organize the day, but since we are in three different hotels, breakfast worked a little differently this morning. We are met respectively at our hotels and then made our way to the “School of the Saints” for our opening worship at 10 am.

Before we gathered for worship, we had some moving to do. Since Casa St. Maria had a few more rooms opening up on Sunday, those at the third hotel would move over. (Those at Hotel Astor would stay put.) A few of the men went with Estuardo to help move the suitcases of the eleven people from the third floor to the second hotel. It was an interesting maze of steps and hallways, but we loaded up the back end of the pick-up and brought them over. The new rooms were not yet ready, so we had suitcases stashed in this room and that until later in the evening. After supper and devotions we got the last of the rooms straightened out. Eleven more people will certainly over-tax an already stressed water system here – cold showers and little water pressure will be the rule of the week.

We made our way out to the School of the Saints. Some seeing it for the first time, others seeing the improvements made from the last time out. It continues to make progress, but more slowly than most would like. The progress continues to be dictated by financial resources and volunteer time. It is becoming obvious that in a few more years there will be enough children to fill that school as more and more dwellings are emerging in the area. What use to be a fairly lonely road, now is beginning to have a steady flow of people coming and going.

After spending some time looking around we gathered for worship in one the classrooms. We sang, we prayed, we heard God’s Word - the wedding feast in Cana, and we shared the heavenly meal of body and blood of Jesus Christ – a meal that works to unite all of God’s children. When we worship – in such unique sanctuaries, we seemed to be renewed, and inspired and energized in some magnificent ways. We prayed for all you back home, as we knew you were praying for us. (Before we were done, unlike what most of you might have been experiencing back home, it was a bit stuffy in that classroom, so that some were feeling the heat.)

We made our way back to Mommies for lunch, some road while others began making their way back by foot. I have to admit that I have a cherished appreciation for some the extended walks from our worksites, from the school, or even simply from Mommies to our hotels. There is something about the walking that helps us connect with those whom we have come to serve. Maybe it is because they walk everywhere – not everyone, but so many have it so basic, so they walk. Maybe it is because we walk one gets a feel for the land – its ups and downs, its roughness – going over and through the rocks on the roads, going over bridges with no guard rails, and the such. Maybe it is that we have so much more contact with the folks that live there – Holas and smiles and waves. Maybe it is because it slows us down - our day and our schedule – we so often try to impose our way

of life to our time in Guatemala – but the walk brings us back into Guatemala time – we will get there when we get there. Not everyone likes to or is able to walk those walks, and we find other ways to connect and to identify with the folks here in Guatemala. But many like to walk – it makes us make this our home for the week.

We spent the afternoon getting organized for Monday. The medical teams had spent some time on Saturday looking at the clinic, so today they could begin making plans. The exam tables brought down on the bus were moved over to the clinic, the donated supplies were sorted and organized for distribution, supplies stored from years past were dug out of the storage areas to see what we have and thought we had 😊, the teams were organized – medical personal and support staff familiarized with what their tasks might be (key word is “might”). Those who were going to put in the septic system at the school went back out to the school to begin look things over and make a plan. The desk making crew would wait till Monday as there work space was consumed by others and the storage areas had to cleared before they could unearth their tools.

It was a busy day, but not the busy day we had originally planned. This was the day that we had planned to make our way up the mountain to the coffee plantation. The medical team was scheduled to see the families who had needs. Now actually this was more that a coffee plantation – it is a community coop of several business adventures. Originally the government had given these folks – 89 families – a loan to buy the mountainside for their community and coffee plantation. They had begun to diversify over the years – macadamia nuts, working to build a bakery, we had donated sewing machines for a sewing shop, and they had begun constructing the water supply to develop their own hydro-electric plant so to produce their own electricity. The government had also begun to give the individual families grant money to begin to pay back the loan for the land. We decided it was not going to be wise nor safe for us to go to the coop plantation because of rising tensions. Already a year ago the coop split – twenty families decided to go their own way (they were working to be a bit more progressively in their adventures and decisions – such as, they were the ones developing the hydro-electric plant). Over the years our primary contact has been with the people of this splinter group, so those are the people we knew best. Some of us witnessed this tension first-hand a year ago as we were confronted by a group of them as we were on a walking tour of the area. The tensions – mostly over how the government money has or should be spent – have escalated to a point where the group of twenty families have been attacked, harassed, stolen from and some of the men driven out of the community by the others. The police and military have been involved on several occasions for a couple of different reasons. And there has been a case that is in the court system and hopes to get resolved this week.

The bottom-line – the plantation people did not want us taking the risk of coming up, nor are we willing to take such a risk and possibly endanger anyone who has come down with this mission. It is sad that such tensions always seems to persist in our world. It is sad that we would not get to see nor help some our friends in the ways that we were hoping too. Five of the men came to the Dardon home this afternoon to explain the situation more thoroughly. The result of that conversation, it was negotiated to hire them to dig our tile lines for the leach field of the school’s septic system on Monday – they will be

our “back-hoe(s)” for the week. They were excited to have some work since their livelihood has at least temporarily been taken from them. And we were excited that some other than “we” were going to have to dig. Digging is using a pick-axe more than a shovel. We dug on Sunday to find a few things – much sweat, more body odor, and a few blisters made it obvious (if it was not already) that we would gladly share our tools.

Sunday night supper was special – we celebrated with the family Brian Dardon’s 12th birthday (Estuardo and Diane’s son). We ate well again, with a few of his favorites, including pizza. Then Brian blew out his candles, as Guatemalan custom would have it he was given the first bite of the cake (as much on his face as in his mouth) with a little push of it into his face, and then out came the piñatas and fireworks. After all were partied out, we made our way to our hotels to call it a night. God’s presence blessed us throughout the day – again.